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three canadian experiences

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april 1975
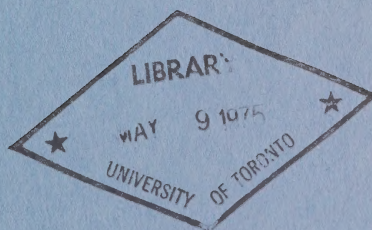
ORGANIZING FOR SOCIAL ACTION:
THREE CANADIAN EXPERIENCES

A Report Prepared for the
National Council of Welfare
By Those Who Took Part

National Council of Welfare
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April 1975

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INTRODUCTION

Participation by citizens in the decisions which affect their lives is a goal fervently espoused by citizen groups. It is also a goal to which governments have persistently voiced their commitment. But however much honored in promise, this goal has been little realized in practice. Decisions which affect people are made every day by governments; the people affected by them are seldom heard in the process.

In the result, government is very often blamed - and not always without justification. But the full range of obstacles to effective participation goes far beyond the problems of cumbersome and unresponsive government structures. There is no question that government must change many of its traditional practices if meaningful participation by ordinary citizens is to take place. But there has never been an absolute absence of opportunities for participation - just an unequal distribution of such opportunities. Some special interests have been able to participate to a wholly disproportionate extent in the shaping of government decisions and public attitudes toward those decisions while other voices have been unable to make themselves heard.

Among the obstacles to more broadly based participation has been that many of those seeking to participate in decision-making processes have had little understanding of those processes or how they operate. Those opposed to tax reform, for example, not only had the advantage of wealth and position in the "national debate" of several years ago, but they also had a very sophisticated understanding of how the levers of public opinion can be moved and the hand of government moved with it.

Policy decisions are not made in vacuums. They are made in the context of social circumstances and to survive they must pass the test of public acceptance. Government

cannot do what public opinion will not let it do. And it almost certainly will do what public opinion insists it must do. This report is about three successful exercises in participation by those who had neither wealth nor social power on their side, three instances in which those who were to be affected by social policy decisions successfully organized the public support for their position necessary to win its acceptance by government.

In Winnipeg, a group composed largely of welfare recipients organized in opposition to a proposal that the city's welfare allowances be reduced by the amount of the increase which had been made in federal family allowances. They were successful in winning the support and involvement of a variety of social agencies, community groups, professional associations, churches and others. As a result, they were successful in convincing city council to reject the proposal.

In Quebec, a coalition of natural parents, foster parents and social workers organized in opposition to a provincial government proposal which would have required low-income natural parents with children in foster care to pay a large portion of the cost of this foster care. With the support of a number of social agencies, the provincial Corporation of Social Workers and others they succeeded in winning substantial changes in the government's proposed policy.

In Saskatchewan, a group from the province's only legal service clinic, together with the provincial poor people's organization, a number of churchmen, social agency staff and others were able to focus the issue of community legal services vs. fee-for-service (judicare) approaches to legal aid in such a way as to involve a broad spectrum of

organizations and institutions in support of the community
legal service clinic concept. This broad support was
instrumental in moving the province to adopt this clinic
approach over the opposition of the province's Law Society.

This report has been prepared in the hope that the
lessons which can be learned from these three successful
exercises in participation can help other groups in other
places to more effectively participate in the decisions which
will affect them and their communities. It was prepared in
two stages.

First, meetings were held in Montreal, Winnipeg and
Saskatoon with representative groups of those who had
participated in each of these successful organizing experiences.
From these meetings the three case histories were prepared.
Later a two-day national meeting took place with representa-
tives of the three regional groups participating. At this
meeting an attempt was made to draw out the common threads
from the three experiences and analyze them.

Where the local meetings had been directed at
chronicling the three experiences, the national meeting was
directed at drawing conclusions from them. It looked at
such questions as how issues are defined, techniques for
building organizational support, forms of organization in
pursuing issues, and the role played by the media in this
process.

A total of 21 people were involved in this two-stage
process. Three of the participants were members of the
National Council of Welfare who had been active in the
respective organizing experiences as members of low-income
community groups. The balance of the participants included

social workers, lawyers, clergymen, employees of social
agencies and members of community groups.

Part I of this report is the product of the local
meetings and is a description of the three experiences.
Part II is the product of the national meeting at which the
lessons to be learned from them were assessed.

<u>PART I:</u>

THE THREE EXPERIENCES

THE WINNIPEG FAMILY ALLOWANCE ISSUE

The Issue

The issue in Winnipeg was whether part of the federal
family allowance payment of $20 per child per month should
be considered as income in calculating the amount of a
family's entitlement under the municipal welfare program.
It had been the longstanding policy of the Winnipeg welfare
department - and of virtually every other municipal and
provincial welfare department across Canada - to exempt the
entire family allowance payment in calculating the assistance
level. In March 1974 it was proposed that this policy
should be changed, and it was in opposition to this change
that a broad-based, loose alliance of social agencies,
churches, poor people's groups and others was formed.

For 25 years from 1948 to 1973 the monthly family
allowance payments had been $6, $8 or $10 per child, depend-
ing on the child's age. In April 1973 the federal government
proposed a major increase in these payments to $20 per child
per month. This new rate went into effect in January 1974.
There was no immediate indication in Winnipeg that the policy
of totally exempting these payments would be changed.

In March, however, the city welfare department prepared
a report for a committee of city council which suggested a
new policy. The report put forward three alternatives for
dealing with family allowances in computing welfare
entitlements: The first was to continue the existing policy
of totally excluding the payments. The second alternative
was to exclude only that portion of the family allowance that
a family would have gotten under the old system, and to
consider the remainder as income; that is, the family would
be allowed to keep the $6, $8 or $10 per child it would have

received prior to 1974, but none of the increase. The third alternative - and one which seems to have never been seriously considered - was to deduct the entire family allowance payment as income.

The report went on to propose that there should be a concurrent increase in municipal welfare rates. The largest part of this was an average increase of 25% in the food allowance. According to city welfare figures, the income from welfare of a family of two adults and two children aged 8 and 14 would have been increased to $360 a month from a previous $339. However, these figures did not include the income from the family allowance and the effect of a changed policy in regards to exempting these payments in determining income. If the second policy alternative were to be adopted, the sample family's total income (welfare plus family allowance) would in fact have been reduced to $374 from a previous $379. The only policy alternative that would have left the family better off was the first one, to continue to totally exempt the family allowances.

The issue was fought out in two stages. During the first stage, which lasted from March to May, the welfare rate increase was pushed into the background while the primary attention focussed on the family allowance policy. The organizations that opposed the change in the policy supported the increase in welfare rates, and were working for a double victory. However, during this period the broad public perception of the issue was the question of what would happen to the family allowances of city welfare recipients. The second, and shorter stage, occurred in August and September and was concerned with the welfare rate increase.

What Happened

The report of the city welfare department was scheduled to go to the Environment Committee of city council at its meeting on Monday, March 25, 1974. This is the committee which makes recommendations to the council regarding welfare.

The report was not to be made public before its submission to the Committee. However, through a contact in the city welfare department, the Winnipeg Council of Self-Help, the largest organization of welfare recipients in the city, was advised of the contents of the report on the Friday before it was scheduled for submission. In spite of the very short advance notice, the Council prepared a presentation to the Environment Committee outlining its support for the welfare rate increase and its opposition to the deduction of any part of the family allowance. The presentation pointed out that the combined effect of the rate increase and the deduction of part of the family allowance would leave some welfare families worse off.

The Environment Committee voted in favor of the rate increase as well as the policy to deduct the family allowance increase from a family's welfare entitlement (alternative two). Although the Self-Help Council did not succeed in blocking the policy change, it was nonetheless important that it was able to be heard before the Committee since its opposition to the proposal was reported in the media.

The Environment Committee recommendations were scheduled to go before city council on April 3. This gave little time to plan strategy. The leadership of the Council of Self-Help made three decisions. The first, an internal one, was that there would not be time to follow the usual practice of involving the entire membership in all aspects of the

planning process; the leadership would have to make decisions and they would have to be prepared to account for their actions to the members. The second decision was to write to all of the members of city council to explain their position, and this was done immediately. Finally, it was decided to enlist the help of the staff of the Neighbourhood Service Centre, a community-oriented social agency, in developing a general strategy for fighting the issue. The Self-Help Council had received assistance from individual staff members of social agencies many times in the past, but this was the first time they had ever tried to enlist the help of the full staff of another organization in mapping strategy.

The meeting with the Neighbourhood Service Centre was held on March 28. It was agreed that two steps should be taken immediately. The first was to do a mailing to potentially sympathetic social agencies and organizations in Winnipeg to solicit their support. The second was to hold a public meeting on the evening prior to the city council meeting. This meeting was intended partially as a show of strength and partially to clear the confusion on the part of welfare recipients, agencies, and the general public on the issue. The Neighbourhood Service Centre staff further agreed to support the Council of Self-Help in any other way they could.

The mailing to the social agencies was done the next day. It suggested a variety of things that agencies could do - from simply studying the issue, to telling their clients and/or members about the issue and the upcoming public meeting, to taking a public stand on the issue. It also included a statement of the position of the Winnipeg Council of Self-Help. The Neighbourhood Service Centre actually did the mailing which was on Council of Self-Help letterhead.

The mailing played an important role in the process because it was the first means by which many agencies were made aware of the issue. It was supplemented by telephone calls to several agencies and organizations by a social work student on placement at the Self-Help Council.

The importance of this direct contact with key persons in these organizations cannot be underestimated, especially in light of the short amount of time available to muster support. It was pointed out during the meeting with the Neighbourhood Service Centre that no one knew who were the key people in many organizations, nor how policy decisions were made in many organizations. And yet, as the experience in this issue was to point out on several occasions, this information was critical. A clear example of this was the involvement of the Winnipeg YWCA.

The social work student at the Self-Help Council telephoned a staff person at the Y's Women's Centre on Friday. This staff person called a couple of members of the Y board who, she thought, would be sympathetic to the issue and sought their opinions. The board members agreed that the Y should take a stand, and over the weekend they polled the other 28 members of the board. By Monday after- noon they had the unanimous consent of the board to issue a public statement opposing the deduction of family allowances. It was the first time in the Winnipeg YWCA's history that such a method had been used to obtain a decision of the board, and set a precedent which the board has since decided to follow whenever a decision on public issues must be made quickly.

The involvement of the Manitoba Association of Social Workers and of a student/faculty committee of the University of Manitoba School of Social Work was likewise brought about

by contacting the right person at the right time. In this case it was through a telephone call to a member of the faculty of the School of Social Work who was instrumental in the involvement of both groups. The Action Committee of the Association of Social Workers made a presentation before city council opposing the family allowance policy change - a position which was reaffirmed the next day by the annual meeting of the Association.

Press coverage throughout this stage of the issue was quite complete. The articles on the Environment Committee meeting included portions of the presentation of the Council of Self-Help. There was a lengthy follow-up story the next day quoting the executive directors of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and of the Winnipeg Council of Self-Help on the negative effects of the Committee's proposals on welfare recipients. Additional articles covered the statements of support from the other organizations. It is significant to note that all of the major stories at this stage appeared in a newspaper which has a reporter who has specialized in social welfare stories and who is well informed on the issues.

The public meeting planned for the eve of the council meeting attracted about 100 people. It had been advertised through paid notices in the two Winnipeg dailies as well as through a variety of other channels. Four city councillors were present to give their positions, including one who strongly opposed the stand of the Self-Help Council. One result of the public meeting was the involvement of municipal welfare recipients by their attendance at both this meeting and next day's city council meeting. The membership of the Self-Help Council had primarily been persons on long-term provincial welfare; this was the first issue in which large numbers of city welfare recipients were mobilized.

On April 3 the full city council met to discuss the recommendations of the Environment Committee. Under the normal rules, it would not have been allowed to hear citizens' delegations. Considerable prior lobbying had been conducted to make councillors aware of the objections to the recommendations and to try to get a chance for the various groups to make these objections known publicly to the council. Finally, through the intervention of a member of city council, the rules were waived and several groups made presentations. These included the YWCA, the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Action Committee of the Manitoba Association of Social Workers, the student/faculty committee from the School of Social Work, and the Social Planning Council, as well as the Winnipeg Council of Self-Help.

The presentations of these organizations persuaded city council to reconsider the entire matter. By a vote of 31 to 10 the questions of the family allowance policy and of the rate increase were referred back to the Environment Committee. Although they had not succeeded in their dual objective, the alliance had stopped the implementation of the policy change - something which they viewed as a considerable victory.

Meeting on April 8, the Environment Committee decided simply to refer the matter to yet another committee, this time its sub-committee on welfare services. This was a seven-person group, chaired by a member of the Environment Committee, which included persons in the community (though not on city council) having special expertise in welfare. The whole issue was now back to the beginning.

A month of meetings of various committees followed. During this period the number of agencies and organizations which supported the position of the Winnipeg Council of

Self-Help grew, reaching about 20. Some of the new groups included the social services department of a hospital, several local churches and a number of women's organizations. Perhaps the most influential organization to lend its support during this period was the Winnipeg Presbytery of the United Church, and its involvement provides another example of the importance of a key person who knows how an organization works.

The monthly meeting of the Presbytery was coming up and a staff person who was sympathetic to the position of the Council of Self-Help had arranged for the Council's director to make a presentation to the meeting. At the last moment, however, the executive of the Presbytery cancelled the invitation, arguing that it would be unfair to present the assembly with only one side of the issue.

It seemed, at this point, that the issue had been effectively blocked from reaching the floor. One minister, however, who had been contacted by the Council and who thought the issue was important and should be considered, decided he would bring the matter to the floor by way of a private member's bill. Having introduced the bill, he then called upon a member of the Self-Help Council to explain the Council's position. His bill was then voted upon and approved by the Presbytery by an overwhelming majority. Again the initiative of one individual within the organization had led a very influential organization to adopt a public stance on an issue in which it would not have otherwise become involved.

During the month of committee meetings an important new task had to be performed: keeping each of the support groups aware of what was happening. There was little that the various groups could actually do, and yet it was very important that they be aware of the state of the issue so

they could be mobilized quickly if the situation required it. This was accomplished through a series of newsletters sent out by the Council of Self-Help.

The newsletters reported on the various meetings and their results. On April 18 the sub-committee on welfare services met to consider the family allowance policy. After much debate the sub-committee recommended that the existing family allowance exemption policy be continued. On April 29 the Environment Committee concurred in this recommendation, and this part of the issue was on the way to a successful conclusion.

The sub-committee went on to recommend that the increase in welfare rates should also be approved. This recommendation was rejected by the Environment Committee. On May 15 the full city council approved the continuation of the family allowance policy and deferred consideration of a welfare rate increase, instructing the Environment Committee to review the question in August. Half of the issue had been won; the other half, for the moment at least, remained in abeyance.

On August 26 the Environment Committee recommended an average 9.2% raise in welfare rates. Prior to this meeting the Council of Self-Help had alerted the other groups in the alliance in case there would be a need for concerted action. However, the wide margin by which the increase passed the committee made it seem reasonably certain that it would be approved by the full council.

On September 5 the Executive Committee gave its approval, and on September 11 the full council voted 29 to 12 in favor of the welfare rate increase. The second part of the issue was won.

Some Conclusions

The nature of this issue was certainly an important factor in the broad support which it generated. Family allowances are literally a "motherhood issue"; taking them away from anyone - and particularly from the poorest of the poor - would be sure to generate a lot of emotion. The supporters of the change in policy could be, and were, characterized as trying to save the municipality a little money at the expense of the recipients, and at the same time as another level of government was trying to help everyone. Once the issue was explained in clear and simple terms, it was an easy one to support.

This alone, of course, does not explain why the issue was won. Many other issues which have been as clear and which should have been as easy to support, have been lost, so there must have been some special factors at work here.

The first was the ability of the Winnipeg Council of Self-Help to move quickly during the first stages of the process. If the Council had been slower to respond, the issue could have been lost. Presumably the structure of the Council was a crucial factor in its ability to move quickly. Also of significance were the contacts which the Council had with persons in the city administration. If it had not been advised in advance by an official of the city welfare department of the upcoming report, the initial move by the Environment Committee would have caught them totally unprepared. Likewise, without good relations with a member of city council, they could not have had the rules waived so the various presentations could be made at the April 3 meeting. These two insiders within the structure of the municipal government played key facilitating roles.

The Council of Self-Help also played an important information clearinghouse function, primarily through the mailing to social agencies and follow-up calls and later through the newsletter. It first made the various organizations aware of the issue - and of the part which they could play - and then kept them aware. It made sure that all of its supporters knew the current status of the issue and what important public meetings were coming up. This kept all of the organizations informed even when there were no actions that they were called upon to perform. The objective of the Council was to keep the organizations informed so they had the information to become involved when they decided to.

The role of these organizations, in demonstrating broad-based public support, was crucial to the result. In almost every case the initiative of one or two individuals can be seen in moving their organizations to this involvement. Often these were people holding key positions in their organizations but, as the example of the United Church Presbytery shows, a single member can move the group if the circumstances are right.

Thus the Winnipeg experience appears to reflect four crucial elements: the nature of the issue, the timing in responding to it quickly enough, the contacts which led to the series of initiatives in various organizations, and the ongoing communication through the several months by which the organization taking the primary initiative kept the other interested organizations fully in touch with developments.

THE QUEBEC FOSTER CARE ISSUE

The Issue

At issue in Quebec was the question of financial responsibility for the support of children placed in foster care. It had been the longstanding policy of the Quebec Ministry of Social Affairs that natural parents should contribute towards the support of their children in foster care. This, however, represented more of a principle than a clearly defined policy, and it had been neither extensively nor consistently applied in cases where the natural parents did not seem financially able to support the child.

In late 1973 the Ministry drafted new regulations which spelled out a very clear policy in this area. The principal feature of these regulations was the establishment of a specific rate of contribution which would be assessed against natural parents of children in foster care or in detention centers. The payments were to vary according to family income and family size, and would in no case exceed what the provincial government paid the foster parents for the child's care. The minimum payment would be $37 per month for a child aged 11 years or younger, and $42 per month for a child aged 12-17; this would be increased by $1 for each $24 of family income above a certain base. Families on social aid (welfare) would be treated on the same basis as all other families. They would be required to make the same minimum payments which, in their case, would come from the family allowance paid on behalf of the child plus the amount granted by welfare for the child. Earned income, if the family had any, would again mean an increased contribution.

The regulations specified that the job of collecting these payments from the natural parents should be given to the local Social Service Centers. These centers, being organized across Quebec to coordinate the delivery of social services, are the largest social service agencies in the province and the most important. Previously those natural parents who were making payments for children in foster care made the payments directly to the Ministry of Social Affairs. Turning the responsibility for collecting the payments to the same agencies that have to provide social services represented a significant change in policy.

Finally the regulations increased the monthly rate paid by the Ministry to foster parents. The new rates set out in the regulations ranged from $75 to $100 a month, depending on the age of the child. According to the Ministry, these new rates represented an average increase of 34% over the existing rates. It was contended, however, that this figure was misleading since part of the new rates would be recovered from the increased federal family allowance. The actual increase in provincial expenditures was, in fact, quite a bit smaller than it was represented to be.

The Quebec foster care issue centered on the implementation of these regulations; this was scheduled to occur on January 1, 1974, when they were to come into effect. It was a complex issue which simultaneously involved three questions: (1) the level of contribution expected from the natural parents, (2) the means by which such contributions should be collected, and (3) the adequacy of payments to foster parents. Each of these questions was central to one of the three groups which made up the core of the foster care coalition: the natural parents who would have to make the

contributions; the social workers and social agencies who
would have to collect the money; and the foster parents who
had to bring up the children in their care. It was the
combination of these three groups which gave the coalition
the strength which it had.

What Happened

Organizations of natural parents and foster parents
were already in existence in Montreal before the foster care
issue arose. In the English-speaking community there was a
group of parents of children in care known as the Social
Agency Consumers (S.A.C.); it had produced a manual outlining
the legal rights of children and parents, and had done
considerable advocacy work on behalf of families involved
with child welfare authorities. S.A.C. was a member of the
Greater Montreal Anti-Poverty Coordinating Committee
(G.M.A.P.C.C.) which was the umbrella organization of
anglophone poor people's groups across Montreal.

There were also the Foster Parents Association, whose
members were primarily English-speaking, and the mostly
francophone Provisional Foster Parents. One of the concerns
of both groups was the adequacy of the provincial rates
paid to foster parents. The Foster Parents Association had
been told in October that changes were forthcoming in the
regulations governing foster care, but they had not been
told the nature of the regulations.

The first word on the actual contents of the new
regulations came in early November when a copy of the
regulations fell into the hands of G.M.A.P.C.C. and a
reporter at a Montreal newspaper. The reaction from poor
people's groups was immediate and angry. Both G.M.A.P.C.C.
and S.A.C. spoke out against the proposed regulations.

In a move which proved crucial to the later formation
of the coalition, the Foster Parents Association also spoke
out against the regulations. This had come about because
the executive of the Association felt strongly that the
proposed regulations were unfair to natural parents, as well
as providing inadequate payments to foster parents. The
Association called a press conference to voice its opposition.
The executive also wrote to all of its members to explain
the reasons for its position and to urge each member to
write to his/her provincial legislator. Later the Association's
executive wrote a statement of its position which was printed
in one of the Montreal newspapers. The early and decisive
action of the executive was key in swinging the Foster
Parents Association to oppose the proposed regulations; it
also showed the natural parents' group that they would have
an ally from a sector with which they would normally have
had quite divergent - and conflicting - interests.

G.M.A.P.C.C. had scheduled a meeting in mid-November
with some senior staff of the Ministry of Social Affairs.
The meeting had been planned before the regulations on
foster care were known and it had been intended as a more
general discussion on social aid. But coming as it did with
the revelation of the foster care regulations, this subject
dominated what was frequently a heated discussion with a
large group of people in attendance.

It was clear after this meeting that decisive steps
would have to be taken if the proposed regulations were to
be changed. Several groups wanted to take action, and some
informal planning had begun to take place. But the planning
was disjointed and there was little communication among the
groups. A few people in S.A.C. and some social workers saw
that a more coordinated effort was needed. They went around
to the principal groups and organizations to try to persuade

them of the need for concerted action; they pointed out to each group how its own interests would be hurt by the regulations and how something could be effectively done by working with the other affected groups. Seeing that it would be possible to bring the groups together to plan strategy, the S.A.C. people asked G.M.A.P.C.C. to call a public meeting on the issue and to invite all of the groups that might be interested.

The meeting was held in early December. Its purpose was to discuss strategy and to plan action. Besides members from S.A.C., the Foster Parents Association and the G.M.A.P.C.C. local groups, there were several natural and foster parents who had not belonged to any of the groups. There were also social workers and staff of social agencies in attendance. The involvement of social workers at this stage of the issue was mostly through the Ad Hoc Committee of Social Workers, which was made up of Montreal social workers who had come together in the spring of 1973 to press for social reform in several areas.

It was at this meeting that the nucleus of the foster care coalition came together for the first time. It was to consist of five basic elements: natural parents; foster parents; social workers; social agency staff; and a group of day care workers. The latter group was a new element and the only one which was not directly affected by the foster care issue. At the time, they were fighting to obtain funds to continue day care centers which had been operating on L.I.P. grants, but which were threatened with closing as these grants ended. They argued that the reason Quebec had the highest proportion of children in foster care of any Canadian province was, in part, that its provision for day care was virtually non-existent. The day care group

contended that foster care provisions could be more equitable
for both natural parents and foster parents if the pressures
on the system could be reduced by increasing access to day
care. They therefore joined the foster care coalition to
lend their support, and also to seek the support of the
other coalition members in their own day care struggle.

The decision which was reached at the meeting was to
hold a teach-in to generate more publicity and to increase
public understanding of the foster care issue. In spite of
excellent press coverage of the proposed regulations and of
the opposition of poor people's groups, the complexity of
the issue still left many questions unanswered in the minds
of the members of the groups, and even more so in the minds
of the general public.

The teach-in was planned for December 14 in the offices
of the Ville Marie Social Service Centre. This site was
chosen because the Ville Marie Centre would become the
agency responsible for collecting payments from English-
speaking natural parents when the regulations came into
effect. The Centre's staff were essentially sympathetic to
the position of the groups who were planning the teach-in;
on the day of the teach-in any staff person who wished to
attend was allowed the day off and only a skeleton staff
was kept on duty to provide essential services.

The foster care coalition grew out of the G.M.A.P.C.C.-
called meeting as a mechanism for planning and running the
teach-in. A teach-in steering committee made up of repre-
sentatives from each of the participating groups was formed,
and it met several times before the teach-in.

The steering committee struck a team to do research
on the foster care issue and to prepare a report on the
proposed regulations that could be used at the teach-in to

explain the issue. Out of this came a nineteen-page paper
entitled "Good-bye Mom"; it included a considerable amount
of research which had been done on foster care over the
summer by the Ad Hoc Committee and a group of social work
students at McGill University. "Good-bye Mom" was to be an
important tool to the coalition, both at the teach-in and
later, to explain its position on the foster care issue.

The teach-in was held, as planned, on December 14. On
the same day the Minister of Social Affairs formally
announced the regulations which were to go into effect on a
provisional basis on January 1, followed by a ninety-day period
for public discussion. The timing considerably heightened
the sense of urgency to the teach-in.

As its organizers realized, the teach-in had the
potential for being explosive since it brought together
three groups (the foster parents, the natural parents, and
social workers) who on other occasions had been in vocal
opposition to each other. What had to be achieved was to
make everyone aware of their interrelated interests and the
need to work together for common objectives. To do this the
teach-in had to be very much of an educational affair, since
strategy could only be planned after the issue was clearly
understood.

An opening plenary session was held to review the
essential elements of the issue. Following this, the group
broke into workshops for more discussion and to make
recommendations for strategy. Finally there was a closing
plenary session to bring together the recommendations and to
adopt a strategy. This was followed by a news conference.

The teach-in succeeded in all of its objectives. It
was well attended by 100-150 persons. Conflict between the

various groups did not occur and, in fact, a heightened sense of cooperation developed.

The major decision which grew out of the teach-in was to put pressure on the board of the Ville Marie Social Service Centre to refuse to put the new regulations into effect. It was felt that if the Centre, and hopefully others across the province, refused to collect the payments, the government would be forced to withdraw the plan. The Centre's Foster Board Rate Review Committee, which had been struck by the board to recommend a position on the regulations, had already concluded that there should be no implementation until the entire matter could be renegotiated. The coalition wanted the board to refuse to implement the regulations under any circumstances.

The meeting of the Ville Marie board was scheduled for December 18. In the four days between the teach-in and the board meeting the members of the coalition steering committee had considerable work to do to plan their exact strategy. Several other groups and coalitions were also to make presentations to the board, and there was considerable bargaining on the support which each could give the other on their respective concerns. Plans had to be drawn up to detail what part everyone would play at the meeting.

There was quite a bit of uncertainty as to what the board would decide to do since it had only been in operation for six months and this was the first time it had been asked to take a public stand on a controversial issue. Some of the social agencies that had been brought together to form the Centre had a long history of taking public positions; but others were notorious for their refusal to take a position.

The coalition members contacted potentially sympathetic board members in advance of the meeting, seeking their support. In addition, they put considerable pressure on the senior staff of the Centre to openly support the coalition's position.

Over 100 people attended the board meeting to support the coalition. The planning and careful work paid off as the Ville Marie board endorsed the coalition's stand. The Centre went on record as refusing to set up any mechanism to implement the new regulations; it called on the Ministry to hold public hearings on the entire issue. A very important new voice had now been added to the opposition to the foster care regulations.

While all of the most visible activity during this phase of the issue was in the English-speaking community, francophone groups were equally displeased with the foster care regulations. The French foster parents group expressed its support for the coalition's efforts. It translated much of the material which had been produced by the coalition, including "Good-bye Mom". In mid-January the Provisional Foster Parents had a meeting with the Minister of Social Affairs to speak out against the regulations; representatives of the English-speaking Foster Parents Association were invited to attend.

For its part, the coalition made a real effort during January to increase the participation from the French-speaking community. They did not want the government to think that the issue only concerned the English-speaking groups; they wanted to show that the entire community was united in opposition to the regulations. One of the groups in the coalition, the day care workers, already included both anglophones and francophones. As January went on and the

coalition held many meetings to plan strategy, an increasing
number of French-speaking social workers began to attend the
meetings. It represented yet another important broadening
of the coalition's base.

There was an immediate pay-off when the coalition met
with the Minister of Social Affairs on January 25. In
addition to the representatives of the groups in the
coalition, the Minister was faced by social workers - this
time both English and French - and by representatives from
the French foster parents. Although the meeting failed to
produce any concrete results, the depth of the opposition
to the foster care regulations was clearly displayed.

Following the meeting with the Minister the work of
the coalition turned to putting pressure on the Ville Marie
board to produce a detailed brief to the Ministry which
would reflect the position taken by the coalition. The
coalition decided that it would prepare draft positions on
a variety of subjects it would ask the board to incorporate
into its brief. The work of writing this material became
the principal activity of the coalition during February and
March. Much of this material was incorporated into the
brief which Ville Marie sent to the Ministry in May.

Other events related to the foster care issue were
happening at the same time. On the South Shore, for example,
a new organization of natural parents had been formed and
they gained considerable media coverage as they launched
a campaign to warn all natural parents about the regulations.

In early March the Ministry began to issue bills to
all natural parents, retroactive to January 1, in accordance
with the regulations. There was an immediate furor. The
coalition condemned the move, and their remarks received
extensive coverage in the newspapers.

The Professional Corporation of Social Workers of
Quebec, which had been keenly interested in the issue since
it first emerged, entered the scene actively. It called a
meeting with the staff of some of the English and French
social agencies to obtain their opinions; by this time the
Social Service Centre which served the French-speaking
community had joined Ville Marie in refusing to implement
the regulations. The Corporation arranged a meeting with
the Deputy Minister to discuss its concerns. On March 25 it
issued a public statement expressing its opposition to the
foster care regulations. The Corporation called for the
suspension of the regulations and the holding of public
hearings. The effort of the coalition now had the backing
of the official professional organization of social workers.

On March 26 the coalition staged its last, and its
largest, effort. The Minister of Social Affairs was scheduled
to speak to a group of McGill University alumni at a meeting
which was open to the public. The coalition decided that it
would turn out as many people as possible to attend the
meeting and to turn it into a discussion of the foster care
issue. The format of the meeting lent itself to this strategy
since it was planned that there would first be an address by
the Minister, followed by questions from a five-person panel;
the coalition made sure that the panel members were sympathetic
to their position.

The meeting proved to be dramatic. Coalition supporters
numbered over 250 out of some 400 persons in attendance. The
debate was frequently heated. The Corporation of Social
Workers used the opportunity to present the Minister with
their statement opposing the foster care regulations.

A couple of days after this meeting with the Minister,
the Corporation of Social Workers had its meeting with the

Deputy Minister. In the course of the two-hour discussion the Deputy Minister revealed that there would be changes announced soon in the foster care regulations.

The changes were made public a couple of weeks thereafter when the Ministry of Social Affairs tabled new regulations on April 10, followed by a clarifying statement from the Minister on April 19. The government had agreed to several significant revisions in the foster care regulations: First, the minimum contribution was reduced to $22 per month for a child aged 11 years or younger, and $27 per month for a child aged 12-17; these levels equalled the family allowance payments made in Quebec for the second child in a family. Second, only the minimum contribution would be expected from families on social aid, as well as families of children placed in foster care because they required special education which was not available in the community (for example, a blind or deaf child). Third, the income level up to which only the minimum contribution was expected was increased. Fourth, the formula for calculating the effect of family income on the contribution was made more generous so that the minimum would be increased by only $1 for each $48 of income beyond this level (rather than $1 for each $24). Both of these changes substantially reduced the financial burden on working-poor families. Fifth, the maximum contribution was reduced to 80% of the amount paid by the province to the foster parents instead of the entire amount. Finally, there would be recourse to appeals on the application of the regulations to the Welfare Appeal Board. Through the work of the coalition, very significant changes had been brought about in the foster care regulations.

Some Conclusions

The most striking feature of the foster care coalition
was the way in which groups with interests that normally
would have been divergent were brought together to work for
a common cause. This very much reflected a sophistication
on the part of the leaders in each of the key groups. It
might have been quite easy, for example, for the foster
parents to have pressed for increased payments to themselves
and perhaps even to have supported the proposal to require
the original rate of contributions from natural parents. The
initial decision of the executive of the Foster Parents
Association, later endorsed by the organization, to support
the position of the natural parents represented a consider-
able understanding of the interrelatedness of the problems
which faced the two groups.

The institutional support which the coalition received
was very important to the outcome of the issue. The
agreement of the Ville Marie Social Service Centre to give
its staff the day off so they could attend the teach-in was
an early example of institutional support. This grew
considerably as both Ville Marie and the Social Service
Centre serving the French-speaking community both notified
the government of their refusal to implement the foster care
regulations. The stand of these two institutions, followed
by the statement by the Corporation of Social Workers, made
it clear to both government and the general public that the
opposition to the regulations was substantial and very
credible.

It is interesting to note that the group which perhaps
gained the most from the changes in the regulations were
working-poor families. Not only was the minimum contribution
significantly decreased, but the income level below which

the minimum would be the sole payment was also increased; as
well, the formula for calculating the effect of additional
income was liberalized. Many of the persons in the groups
involved in the coalition were from working-poor families.
But the membership of poor people's groups as a whole has
primarily been concerned with welfare issues and their
membership has traditionally come from families on social
aid. So this was very much a case where the effort of
persons on welfare won substantial benefits for low-income
working-poor families.

THE SASKATCHEWAN LEGAL AID ISSUE

The Issue

The provision of publicly financed legal services to persons not able to afford a lawyer's fees has received considerable attention in many parts of Canada over the past few years. It became a particular issue in Saskatchewan in 1972 when the provincial government appointed a seven-member commission to hold public hearings, carry out research and make recommendations for a new legal aid system.

At the time of the commission's appointment, the only provincially administered legal aid program in Saskatchewan was a criminal legal aid plan established in 1968. It had been intended as a temporary plan and was restricted to criminal cases.

Whatever new legal aid plan was to be recommended by the commission, it would have to go beyond criminal law and into civil law. However, the kinds of civil law problems faced by poor people many times differ significantly from those facing more affluent groups. They can involve areas of legislation only affecting poor people - welfare law, for example. They often involve suits over small sums of money against landlords or merchants. To the extent that the day-to-day situations faced by a poor person differ from those faced by a middle-class person, so also do the kinds of legal problems they encounter.

So a basic question in setting up a legal aid system is how can the system be made responsive and sensitive to the needs of those it is intended to serve. As experience in various legal assistance plans has shown, the key to answering this question lies in the method by which the legal services are provided.

The issue in Saskatchewan was precisely this: What was the best method for providing legal services to low-income people? The debate centered on two alternative approaches.

The first was a fee-for-service judicare system. Under such a plan, all of the lawyers in the province who wanted to participate would simply have to sign up. When a person had a legal problem and was found eligible for legal services (on the basis of a means test), he would be given a list of participating lawyers and could pick which- ever one he wanted. The fees for various kinds of services would be predetermined by the provincial government in consultation with the Law Society. The principal argument in favor of such a system was that it gave the client the choice of the lawyer he wanted. It was the approach already in operation in Ontario where there were serious questions about its efficacy in providing the legal services needed by the poor.

The alternative to judicare was the legal service clinic approach. This involved setting up neighborhood law offices with community-elected boards across the province. The salary of the lawyers in these offices would be paid out of public funds, and they would not have a private practice in addition to their clinic work. The close connection between the clinics and the communities which they were intended to serve would make the clinics especially responsive to community need, it was argued.

An example of how such clinics would operate was already close at hand in the Saskatoon Legal Assistance Clinic. Founded in 1969 as a voluntary effort of some Saskatoon lawyers, the clinic had received a demonstration grant in 1971 from the federal government. The Saskatoon Clinic had a community board. It was well thought of by

residents in its area who had made substantial use of its services. It seemed to be the kind of operation that responded to the special needs of poor people.

In the summer of 1972 a second clinic opened in Duck Lake, a small community in the northern part of the province. Begun under an Opportunities for Youth grant, the Duck Lake Legal Aid Clinic offered a successful example of a clinic operating in a rural area.

The issue, then, was which alternative the commission should recommend to the provincial government.

What Happened

In the summer of 1971 a new provincial government had been elected in Saskatchewan. A group from the Saskatoon Legal Assistance Clinic (including the Clinic's staff lawyer, a student articling at the Clinic, and a professor at the University of Saskatchewan School of Law) saw this as a good opportunity to urge the province to take a fresh look at the issue of legal services for poor people. The existing criminal legal aid plan had been introduced by the previous government as an interim measure, with the promise that it would be expanded and improved. In 1971 the founding conference of the province-wide poor people's organization had endorsed the concept of legal service clinics. There was every indication that the new government would be sympathetic to examining the issue.

The group at the Saskatoon Clinic proceeded to put together a brief to the provincial Attorney-General, calling for the establishment of a commission to investigate and make recommendations on legal services for the poor. The Attorney-General seemed receptive to their proposal.

Although it seemed reasonably certain that the govern-
ment was committed to setting up a commission, a public
announcement on the commission was slow in coming. Several
months went by without any word. During this period, however,
some very important groundwork was being done by the group
at the Saskatoon Clinic to build support for a legal service
clinic approach. For one thing they realized that when the
commission began its work it would need a good list of
organizations whose views should be sought and who would be
potentially sympathetic to legal service clinics; so they
worked to assemble such a list. They also realized that the
question of legal services was not well understood in the
community so they used every chance they had to talk to
groups about the issue and to get groups thinking about
legal services, and in particular about the advantages of a
clinic approach.

In the spring of 1972 the provincial government formally
announced the Commission. It was to be chaired by the Dean
of the Law School at the University of Saskatchewan. Its
members included two Benchers (members of the governing body)
of the Law Society, the staff lawyer of the Saskatoon Clinic,
a representative of the Indian community, a representative
of a poor people's group in Regina, and a provincial judge.

The Commission had a broad mandate to make whatever
recommendations it thought necessary. Its membership was
balanced, including two persons from the Law Society (which
was already known to favor judicare) and the staff lawyer of
the Saskatoon Clinic. It was clearly not a rubber-stamp
commission and there was no way of knowing at the outset
what kind of approach it would endorse.

The Commission set October as the time for holding
public hearings. Any interested organization or individual
could present a brief. Soon after its announcement, the
Commission wrote to various groups across Saskatchewan
asking for submissions; among these were the groups on the
list that had been assembled over the winter. If it had not
been for the advance preparation of this list, many groups
that were to favor the legal service clinic approach might
never have been invited to make submissions.

The Law Society of Saskatchewan moved quickly to begin
preparation of its submission to the Commission. A professor
at the School of Law was hired to write the Society's brief.
Its recommendation was a foregone conclusion since the Law
Society was already on record in favor of judicare. Its
brief would argue that without judicare there could not be
freedom of choice in selecting a lawyer. And the prestige
of the Law Society in presenting this argument would weigh
heavily on the public mind.

It was clear to the group at the Saskatoon Clinic
who had prepared the original brief proposing the commission
that the case for a clinic approach could not simply be left
on its own to develop. A lot of work would have to be done
to make sure that the organizations which were potential
supporters of the clinic approach developed their positions
and made them known. Some of this had already been begun
by the three over the winter, but a more intensive effort
would be needed. Much of it would be a matter of educating
organizations on the issue since it was not clearly under-
stood. The Saskatoon Clinic group (now minus the Clinic's
staff lawyer who had been appointed to the Commission) took
this job on themselves. The role they played was critical
in the final success of getting the province to adopt a

legal service clinic approach. It was always an informal
role, consisting in part of generally clarifying to organiza-
tions and individuals what was involved, in part keeping a
flow of information on what was happening, and in part loosely
coordinating. The importance of their work can be seen by
looking at the process by which a couple of key organizations
prepared their submissions.

The Saskatchewan Council of Anti-Poverty Organizations
(S.C.A.P.O.) is a province-wide umbrella organization of poor
people's groups; in 1972 it included 22 groups. When the
letter from the Commission was received, S.C.A.P.O. was in
the midst of switching over to a new organizational structure
and of negotiating with the provincial Department of Social
Services for funding. The initial reaction of the officers
was that there would not be the time to prepare a submission.

After discussions with the law student from the
Saskatoon Clinic and with the law professor, however, the
organization was persuaded of the importance of their making
a submission. S.C.A.P.O. was the most broadly-based
organization representing poor people in Saskatchewan; it
could speak on behalf of the people for whom the legal
service program would be designed. To them, the question
was a very practical one which would affect the lives of their
members.

The organization's officers got together with the group
from the Saskatoon Clinic and discussed legal services. The
S.C.A.P.O. members could talk from experience about the kinds
of legal problems faced by poor people and their views on
how these could be met; but they needed some help in
organizing their material and seeing that it answered all
the basic questions. From these discussions the executive
committee put together a nine-page brief which strongly

recommended a community clinic approach. The brief looked
at access to legal services by both individuals and organiza-
tions; eligibility; and the merits, and problems, of legal
service clinics and judicare. It was sent to their local
groups, all of which endorsed it. The groups were encouraged
to make their own submissions and several did so, again
calling for community clinics.

The impact of the S.C.A.P.O. brief, and the briefs of
its member groups, was considerable. By coincidence the
S.C.A.P.O. presentation to the Commission immediately
followed that of the Law Society. The largest newspaper in
the province picked up on this and did a major story comparing
what the Law Society said poor people needed and what the
poor themselves said they needed. It effectively pointed
out the differences between judicare and legal service
clinics. It was a point which had not been lost on the
Commission. The presentations of the member groups in
S.C.A.P.O. reinforced it. These submissions included many
examples of real-life situations which gave a human dimension
to the discussion and which also had an impact on the
Commission.

The story of S.C.A.P.O.'s submission is one of the
clearest illustrations of how vitally important the informal
coordination and information function was to the success of
the issue. Without the initial intervention, the organization
might not have even made a submission. After it had decided
that it should, it needed information and advice so it
could prepare the kind of informed, directed brief which it
presented. Then it, in turn, played an important part in
animating its member groups to participate in the process
by making their own submissions.

Some of the same forces can be seen at work in the development of the submission of the Saskatoon Family Service Bureau. The Bureau was a major social agency and had worked in close cooperation with the Saskatoon Legal Assistance Clinic. On many occasions when the Bureau staff had encountered a family with a legal problem they had referred the family to the Clinic. The agency staff had been impressed by the ability of the Clinic to deal with the legal problems of poor people and were convinced that the Clinic's approach was more effective, on the whole, than the traditional lawyer's office approach.

Like S.C.A.P.O., when it first received the letter from the Commission, the Family Service Bureau felt that it had too much else to do and that it couldn't make a submission. But again through the personal contact from the group at the Saskatoon Clinic they were persuaded that their submission would be important. The Bureau could speak of the experience of a respected social agency with legal service clinics and could, therefore, argue very effectively for the clinic model. Moreover, a strong stand by an essentially traditional organization would show the broad base of support for the clinic approach.

To get the Bureau to take a position it was necessary to convince the board. Since the staff had the actual experience, they had the job of educating their board. One member of the board, however, greatly facilitated the task by deciding that she would become as educated as she could on legal services and play the teacher role on the board. The process was slow, but effective. The Saskatoon Clinic lawyers were available to provide information when it was needed. This was an important job and one that had to be sensitively handled; the board members had to be persuaded

to support a clinic approach, but it would be counterproductive
if they felt they were being railroaded.

In the end, when its members thoroughly understood the
issue, the board strongly endorsed the clinic approach.
Because they took a stand on the basis of solid information,
the board members were able to effectively defend the
position which they took. It again demonstrated the value
of the informal education/information role.

There were other factors, of course, which played an
important part in the final outcome of the issue. Among
these was the openness of the Commission itself in encouraging
and receiving submissions. The Commission did not wait for
groups to come to it; it actively reached out to groups, a task
that was done both by its staff and by its members. Part of
the result of this outreach was that the views of many more
groups were received than might otherwise have been the
case; another important result was that even among groups
that would have made submissions under any circumstance, the
briefs which they submitted included material which was
particularly helpful to the Commission.

Another factor of importance was the role played by
one key person within certain organizations in getting their
groups to take a strong stand. One person, knowledgeable on
an issue, can shape the position of a whole organization.
The story of the submission by the National Farmers Union
demonstrates the crucial part played both by the Commission's
outreach and by a key individual within the group.

The National Farmers Union (N.F.U.) is a large, active
organization in Saskatchewan. Among the services which it
offers its members is a problem-solving and advocacy service
which, at the time of the Commission, was staffed by a layman

without formal legal training. This service had been
heavily used by the N.F.U.'s members. Through his work,
the staff person was well acquainted with the variety of
legal problems which faced poor farmers and the difficulties
which were encountered by a farmer who couldn't afford a
private lawyer.

When the letter from the Commission was received
inviting the N.F.U. to make a submission, the advocacy staff
person asked the executive if he could be assigned the job
of preparing the brief; they concurred. This was not the
means by which such submissions were usually prepared;
normally the organization's legal counsel would have written
the submission.

As the staff person worked on the submission, he
realized that the problem of legal services for poor farmers
could not be separated from that of legal services for poor
people in general. He therefore prepared a brief which
addressed the entire question, with particular emphasis on
the problems of poor farmers. The brief advocated a legal
service clinic approach. Because he could argue the validity
of such an approach on the basis of his day-to-day experience
of dealing with problems, the organization accepted his
submission and it was made to the Commission. It was to
have a great impact on the Commission.

The importance of one individual in moving a group
can be seen in other instances as well. The provincial
Metis Society submission, for example, was also put together
by one person who became interested in the issue, studied
the alternatives, and became an advocate for the legal
service clinic approach. The experience of Society members
in the Duck Lake area with the Duck Lake Clinic was an
influential factor. Input from the Society's locals across

the province was supportive of clinics. But it was the work done by one individual in organizing the material and arguing persuasively for it that got the Metis Society's executive to approve a strong stand for clinics. And it was an important stand since the Metis Society and S.C.A.P.O. together represented the two largest organizations of persons who would be affected by the new program.

The submissions of some organizations were based on positions which they had previously adopted. The provincial conference of the United Church, for example, had already endorsed the concept of legal service clinics even before the Commission was proposed. In their annual submission to the provincial government the Church had called for a new legal aid plan based on clinics.

When the Church was invited to make a submission before the Commission, there was no doubt that it would do so. A sub-committee of its Church in Society Committee prepared the brief, using the staff of the Saskatoon Legal Assistance Clinic to provide them with specific information which they needed. One person on the sub-committee played the key role in getting the brief put together. The submission to the Commission was made by two others, a clergyman who was on the board of the Saskatoon Clinic and a lawyer.

The organizations which have been mentioned are only a few of the large number of groups that appeared before the Commission. Many others, of all different types, came forward. These included social agencies, government organizations, political groups and labor organizations.

Throughout the month of October 1972 the Commission heard a total of 68 submissions, of which 54 were from organizations and the balance from individuals. Among these

68 briefs, 25 discussed the crucial question of what method
should be used in delivering legal aid; the others were
either more general or else looked at specific questions
such as accessibility to legal services. And among this key
group of 25, 20 endorsed the legal service clinic approach
and only two endorsed judicare. It was an overwhelming and
broad-based expression of opinion in favor of legal service
clinics.

Press coverage during this public stage of the
Commission's work was considerable and of good quality.
This was in part due to the continuing work of the group
from the Saskatoon Clinic who kept in contact with a couple
of key reporters and editors and made sure they had the
background information necessary to cover the hearings
intelligently.

The Commission began internal deliberations in November
and delivered its report in the spring of 1973. The report
called for a comprehensive system of legal service clinics
across Saskatchewan. The provincial government adopted the
Commission recommendations and in Spring, 1974, legislation
was passed which established the legal aid plan based on
clinics.

Some Conclusions

The issue in Saskatchewan was not a clear-cut and
simple one. It was, in fact, a very complex issue. Yet
there was a remarkably high degree of participation by a
variety of different groups in making submissions before
the Commission. The explanation for this lies with the key
facilitating, coordinating and informing roles played by the
group from the Saskatoon Legal Assistance Clinic and with

the openness of the Commission. It is very much the story
of a few key people taking vital jobs upon themselves and
doing them well.

Without the Saskatoon Clinic group, the outcome of
the issue might have been very different. They found out
which organizations would be potential supporters for legal
service clinics and they contacted these groups and explained
the issues. This prompted a number of organizations to
participate which might not otherwise have become involved.
They kept organizations informed of developments. And they
were available to provide information and advice to organiza-
tions as they were preparing their submissions. These were
the tasks that made a complex and little-understood issue
into one which many organizations understood and adopted
positions on.

Added to this was the outreach on the part of the
Commission. It displayed a genuine interest in getting the
views of the many agencies, institutions and organizations
in the province. Groups were made to feel their views
would be taken into account and that the effort necessary
to prepare submissions would therefore be well spent. Both
the composition of the Commission and the work of its staff
were important in this respect.

This initial outreach and stimulation of interest in
the issue set in motion the broadly-based support which was
ultimately decisive - the submissions of consumer groups
such as S.C.A.P.O. and the Metis Society, of the N.F.U., and
of churches and social agencies. And within various of
these organizations the key role that can be played by a
single individual was demonstrated again and again.

PART II:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE THREE EXPERIENCES

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The Winnipeg family allowance experience, Quebec foster care experience and Saskatchewan legal aid experience all involved very different sorts of issues. The forums for their resolution were also very different - a city council in one case, a provincial ministry in another and an appointed commission in the third. The prime thing they had in common was that each of them became public issues. In retrospect this may seem to have been inevitable, but without the initiatives taken in each of these situations, that could easily not have been the case.

Changes in welfare and foster care provisions, in provinces and municipalities, are frequent occurrences which usually pass with little public notice. And appointed commissions, even those which hold public hearings, very often generate little debate and sparse result. What marked these three situations was that those faced with what they saw as a problem seized it as an opportunity, created an issue around it, and then won their issue.

There is no magic formula for doing this, but there are basic principles involved. Opportunities to successfully initiate change (or block it if it would be a change for the worse) cannot be fabricated from thin air, but they can often be built from even the least promising looking situations.

The first essential of effective issue organizing is to successfully establish an issue. And while issues are born out of problems, they are not one and the same thing. Many organizing attempts have failed utterly because they sought to resolve a problem without having defined an issue.

Any situation which creates difficulty or hardship
for an individual or a group of individuals is a problem.
Most organizations come into continual contact with a very
broad range of problems. The first and most basic question
that faces any group is which of these many problems it is
going to try to do something about through public action.
In other words, which problems it is going to try to turn
into issues.

The distinction between problems and issues is more
than just a matter of words. There is a real and fundamental
difference between them: A problem can become an issue
only when it is brought to the attention of the public and
becomes a subject of public concern. Problems don't turn
themselves into issues unless there is a group of people
who have a plan for doing something about the problem -
either doing it themselves or trying to get government to
do it - and almost any problem can be turned into an issue
by a group with a plan.

Many of the broad and far-reaching social problems
(slum housing or poverty, for example) are not by themselves
issues. These broad problems can be turned into issues,
however, by developing specific goals in relation to them.
A group that simply advocates eliminating all slum housing,
for example, doesn't have an issue. But in a city where a
residents' association is trying to get the city council to
tear down some specific deteriorated buildings and replace
them with subsidized-rent housing, this aspect of slum
housing has been made an issue. Many such far-reaching
problems have to be broken down into smaller pieces that
can be solved through attainable interim or partial goals.

The group that is choosing an issue has to be realistic. It has to be able to set goals which are attainable. The group will often have to make difficult choices of going after only part of what it wants, if that is all that is attainable in the short-range, and postponing the rest until later.

Timing and circumstances are very important considerations in choosing issues. External factors can frequently have a major impact on what goals are or aren't attainable. A dramatic newspaper article on a particular problem, for example, might open opportunities for effectively raising an issue that might not otherwise have aroused much public interest. For example, there was the recent case of a fire which burned a rooming house and killed a mother and her three children. The fire was caused by the inadequate wiring which, the newspaper account reported, was a common problem in this neighborhood of deteriorated slum housing. The story attracted a great deal of public attention and could have opened excellent opportunities for creating issues related to the problem of slum housing. A group has to stay aware of what opportunities are opened by circumstances and be prepared to take advantage of them.

Situations where a government is in the process of making or reviewing a policy in some area can create particularly good opportunities for bringing up issues. What goals are realistic in any given situation, of course, will depend on the circumstances of the situation. If a government is looking at a question and is open in what alternatives it will consider, far-reaching goals involving substantive change may be attainable. This was the case in Saskatchewan with the legal aid issue. If a government is considering a change that the group thinks is a step backward, the goal might be to simply hold the status quo, as was the case in Winnipeg.

Whatever the situation and whatever the goal, knowing when to act is critical. It is, unfortunately, not something which can be explained by simple do's and don'ts; it comes from experience, good judgement and sometimes good luck.

One factor which is often of great importance is having good contacts within the government who can provide sound advice and/or information so the group can make an intelligent decision. The outcome of the Winnipeg issue might have been quite different if the Council of Self-Help had not been advised by an official of the city welfare department about the forthcoming report; or if the Council did not know the member of city council who got the rules waived so groups could make presentations to council on the issue. The outcome of the Saskatchewan issue was very much affected by the positive attitude and cooperation of some of the commission's members and staff.

In taking on any issue, a group might consider what it wants to gain organizationally. A group that feels it needs a quick victory - a new group, for example - would probably look for a very specific and limited issue. A group that wants to strengthen and broaden participation among its existing members might look for a more general issue and set longer-term goals.

A group should keep its priorities in mind. It has to have some general notion of its overall purpose so it can take on issues that lead towards a long-term goal. If a group takes on every issue that comes along, it may find itself going in so many directions at once that its resources are spread far too thin and its energy spent. A group may from time to time encounter worthwhile issues which are just not in keeping with its priorities, and which it will therefore decide not to pursue.

If a group is dealing with a very broad problem which it has broken down into a number of issues, it has to decide what is the best sequence in which to take on these issues. Some may be necessary as a foundation for others. A housing rehabilitation group, for example, might first go after the issue of city grants to low-income homeowners to assist in the repair of substandard housing. It could then take on the issue of strict code enforcement, knowing that its success on the issue of grants guarantees that such a program would not create hardships for those who can't afford repairs.

Having chosen its issue, the group must decide how it is going to present the issue to the public - that is, how it is going to describe the problem and explain its proposed solution. This is often referred to as defining the issue (or sometimes as "cutting the issue").

The group has to develop a definition of an issue that is as clear as possible and that brings the problem and its proposed solution into sharp focus. Most issues are complicated and are surrounded by gray areas where what may be good and what bad are not easy to determine. The group has to try to cut through this and come up with a clear, understandable definition that doesn't distort the facts but which puts them in as black-and-white terms as possible. The Winnipeg family allowance issue provides a good example of this.

The city council had before it a dual proposal: One part would have granted an increase in municipal welfare; the other would have substantially offset this increase (in the case of some families, more than offset it) by the new policy on family allowances. The welfare department's report tried to define the issue in terms of rationalizing

the welfare system. The Council of Self-Help, however, did
not accept this definition nor did it even address itself
to it; rather, the Council split the issue into its two
parts and redefined the family allowance part in black-and-
white terms: taking the family allowance away from the
poorest families. The outcome turned on this definition of
the issue.

It's usually a safe rule of thumb that a clear
definition of an issue is a simple one - sometimes even
artificially simple if that's what it takes to make it easy
to explain and easy to understand. It makes no sense to
present a case which is thorough, but complex and difficult
to understand, if the result is going to be that few people
will try to comprehend it because of its complexity. It is
better to initially over-simplify the issue so that it will
attract people's attention, and then try to explain the
complexities later, after their interest and concern have
been raised. It often turns out that very few people are
really interested in understanding all of the details, or
feel that it's necessary for them to appreciate all of the
subtleties, in order to support a group's position.

The Quebec foster care issue is an example of a complex
and technical issue that had to be simplified to its
essential elements before it could be explained to the
public. The issue involved questions about the extent of
parental responsibility for the support of their children,
about the determination of levels of provincial welfare and
foster care payments, and about the role of the local social
service centers in the social service system. All of these
were difficult and complicated questions. The coalition
defined the issue in terms of three easy-to-understand
basics: taking money from poor families who already didn't

have enough to live on; turning social workers into bill
collectors for the government; and not providing adequate
payments to foster parents.

To have a simple definition of an issue is not to say,
of course, that the group should ignore the details and
complexities. It can't afford to ignore them if it wants to
attain its goal. One of the easiest ways to dismiss a group's
demands is to dismiss its analysis of an issue as shallow.
If the Quebec coalition had not gone beyond its three basic
points, it would not have gotten very far; it had to have
a great deal of additional information to back up its
position.

When a group takes on an issue it should map out some
educational process for explaining the issue and the group's
proposed solutions to its own members, other organizations
and the general public. The group also has to plan how it
is going to communicate the background information needed
to understand the context of the issue. What may seem
obvious to the group may not be at all obvious to the general
public. Basic information which the group's members may
take for granted because they use it on a daily basis may
be totally unknown to someone who hasn't been faced with the
problem.

The group should not think that everyone will necessarily
see the problem with the same perspective as themselves.
Different aspects of the issue will appeal to different
organizations and individuals; some of these may seem less
important to the group defining the issue, but they may be
the most important thing from someone else's point of view.
In the Winnipeg issue, for example, the aspect which had the
strongest attraction for the YWCA and the Action Committee

on the Status of Women was the fact that sole-support mothers would be the most harmed by the family allowance change.

The group will have to decide which of these other aspects of an issue it wants to stress. Some may be so slightly related or lead to so many tangents that the main issue would be totally lost. Other aspects might be so controversial that they could jeopardize success on the main issue. Or they could create associations in the public mind with basically unrelated matters and muddle the definition of the issue.

Stressing different aspects of an issue can frequently lead to the creation of secondary issues. This might be desirable or even necessary to bring in additional support on the main issue. In Montreal, for example, the coalition took on the secondary issue of day care so that it could obtain the support of the day care workers' group.

Pursuing secondary issues, however, can create confusion if allowed to get out of hand; sometimes the original issue will be lost as more and more effort is put into secondary issues. Secondary issues should be used to strengthen support for the main issue; they should never be allowed to reduce the focus on the main issue. Returning to the Montreal example, it was reasonable to tie in the secondary issue of day care to the main issue of the foster care regulations, since the groups saw the basic problem as being the same. But the coalition kept its attention focussed on what, for it, was the central issue, the foster care regulations.

The ability to choose the right issue at the right time, and to define the issue in a clear and effective way, is a skill which groups will learn mostly from experience.

The effort which is initially spent in defining the issue is usually critical to the outcome. After the group identifies a problem it wants to tackle, and before it does anything public, it has to realistically assess what it wants to do and what it can do. Only after this has been done is the group ready for the next step - determining what potential support from other organizations in the community can be mobilized.

FACILITATION, ALLIANCE OR COALITION

In assessing what potential support it could mobilize on its issue, the group will have to consider what kind of relationship with the possible support organizations would be most effective.

The relationship between organizations working on an issue can take three general forms: It could be an extremely informal one - even to the point where the organizations pursuing the same goal never actually come together - as long as there is someone who keeps in touch with all of them, enabling each to know what the others are doing so they are able to coordinate their actions (or, at least, not inadvertently undercut one another). Or it might be a more structured relationship, perhaps with the group which initiated the issue serving as a focal point and with the involved organizations coming together when necessary for task-oriented sessions. Or it might be a highly structured relationship involving a central decision-making body on which each of the involved groups has formal representation.

The nature of the issue (especially how controversial it is) and circumstances in the community will be important factors in the group's decision as to what kind of relationship

it will try to establish. But some general considerations
should be kept in mind.

The highly informal and unstructured relationship
might be described as a <u>facilitating relationship</u> (or
<u>facilitation,</u> for short). It is intended primarily to
facilitate, or make possible, a flow of information between
groups. It can be particularly effective when there are
several groups working for basically the same goal, but when
it is either not possible or not desirable to bring the
groups together.

Situations where this might be the case are where the
groups are of such different orientation that they would
not agree to work actively together, or when it is tactically
advantageous for the groups to appear to be acting wholly
independently of one another. In the Saskatchewan issue,
for example, an important element was the impact of having
a large number of diverse organizations come out in favor
of legal service clinics (apparently) spontaneously and (in
fact) independently; it underlined, as almost nothing else
could, the breadth of support for the clinic approach and
emphasized the isolation of the Law Society in arguing for
judicare.

The essence of a facilitating relationship is to have
one group - or perhaps only one or more individuals - which
can maintain contact with each of the organizations, pass
on information that each group might need, and thus help
coordinate their activities. This facilitating group should
have the trust of each of the other organizations. It must
be viewed as (at least) neutral by each of the organizations
(neutral as between the groups, that is, and not neutral on
the issue). It might be described as an honest broker
between the groups.

Sometimes the facilitating group has to actively coordinate - especially when the activities of two groups might undercut one another - but this usually is done through persuasion rather than in a more direct method. Depending on the level of trust between the facilitating group and the other organizations, a more extensive kind of coordination might also be possible.

There are many weaknesses to a facilitating relationship. Foremost among these is that the effectiveness of the facilitation can be only as strong as the trust that exists between each of the organizations and the facilitating group. Moreover, if the facilitating group should let down in its efforts, the issue could be lost. Even if the facilitating group is very conscientious and has everyone's trust, it may still not be able to keep on top of what every group is doing, particularly if events are moving quickly.

There are situations, however, where a facilitation may be the only way of mobilizing the needed support, and a group should be prepared to consider such a relationship if this turns out to be the case. It might even be necessary for the group to try to recruit some neutral organization to serve as the facilitating body if it doesn't think it can fill this role itself.

An example of successful facilitation is given by the Saskatchewan legal aid issue. The facilitating group was the group from the Saskatoon Clinic. Their role was initially one of encouraging organizations to make presentations to the commission and later of providing the organizations with information (and on a few occasions assistance) so they could make effective presentations.

In contrast to the Saskatchewan issue, it is useful to consider another example, this time of an issue that was lost but which might have been won had there been a

facilitation. It is a recent case of a proposal before a
city council to locate a senior citizens' high-rise in a
neighborhood of upper-income, single-family homes. The
proposal was opposed by a variety of different groups: A
residents' association opposed the building because of its
impact on the neighborhood (in essence, because it might
lower property values). A left-of-center political group
was against the high-rise for environmental reasons. A
senior citizens' association objected because the area didn't
have neighborhood stores and other facilities that the
residents of the building would need, and because public
transportation in the area was not very good.

Together these three groups could have made a powerful
and effective opposition to the proposal. They were not,
however, willing to work together for their common goal
because of personality conflicts and because their reasons
for wanting this goal were so different. Since there was
no communication - much less coordination - among them, their
appearances before the city council were a disaster. Each
ended up undermining the arguments of the others, and as a
result the issue was lost. Had there been a neutral party
who was in touch with each of them and who might have
persuaded them to take less conflicting positions, the result
could have been different.

On most issues it is not necessary to have such an
unstructured relationship as facilitation. The organizations
which are ready to support a group on an issue are usually
prepared to openly cooperate with each other - at least on
that issue. And it is usually advantageous that their
cooperation be visible so as to underline the strength of
support on the issue. In these cases a more structured
relationship is possible; this might be described as an

alliance, since it involves support groups who ally themselves with the group which has raised the issue.

In an alliance, as in a facilitation, there has to be one group at the center which stays in contact with each of the organizations involved in the issue. However, in an alliance this focal group is usually the one which initiated the issue and which has the strongest interest in it. The primary channel of communication is between the focal group and each of the support groups. The focal group has to play the vital coordination role. It has to get out the necessary information on the status of the issue. Usually it has to suggest what actions are needed from the support groups. As situations may dictate, meetings between all of the support organizations may be required, but these would be task-oriented meetings - frequently for planning strategy.

In an alliance the support groups are expected to give some public evidence of their support - anything from sending a letter, to participating in a demonstration, depending on the circumstances. This public display of support for the common goal as defined initially by the focal group is a basic difference between a facilitation and an alliance: In a facilitation several groups are pursuing the same goal, but they each see it primarily as their own goal, which they want to achieve for their own reasons; there is usually no explicit support for each other, and often there is not even reference to the other groups pursuing the same goal. In an alliance, on the other hand, the groups see the goal as a common one and they share the same basic reason for wanting to achieve that goal (although the focal group usually has the greatest self-interest in wanting to achieve the goal). The support groups offer explicit, visible support for the focal group.

When an alliance relationship is used, it may be possible for the various groups to have somewhat different definitions of an issue - or at least to stress different aspects, depending on their own priorities - provided that there is a substantial common core. Every group can come in from where it's at, and between the groups the issue is defined by its lowest common denominator - by the common core. But it is very important that the common core remain substantial, and that the issue is not repeatedly diluted in a self-defeating effort to get broader and broader support. The focal group will have to decide when the lowest common denominator has become too low, and it will have to draw the line.

The alliance relationship is probably the most common way of bringing support groups together. It means that most of the work, and much of the responsibility, is on the group that initiated the issue and which is serving as the focal group.

An alliance operates on a high degree of trust between the focal group and the support groups. It is important that this trust be maintained. If the focal group suddenly decides to completely change its definition of the issue or adopts some radically different tactic, and if it doesn't discuss these changes beforehand with its support groups, it can't expect that it will still necessarily have their support. This is not to say that the focal group should get so tied down that every small action need be cleared by each support group. However, it should not presume that it can do anything it wants and keep their support. A positive trust between groups means that neither of these extremes will happen and a suitable balance can be found.

The Winnipeg family allowance issue is a clear example
of a successful alliance. The Council of Self-Help was the
focal group. The support groups - its allies on the issue -
included the YWCA, the United Church, the Manitoba Association
of Social Workers, several social agencies and various
community groups.

In approaching these organizations, the Council asked
each of them to make an official and public statement
supporting the position advocated by the Council. At a
crucial point in the issue, the Council asked each organiza-
tion to send a representative to present its statement
before city council.

Communication was primarily between the Council of
Self-Help and each of the support groups. There were no
meetings that brought all the organizations together. The
support groups looked to the Council for guidance as to when
they should act. Although it didn't happen, any support
group could have pulled out whenever it wanted to.

The kind of alliance relationship described by the
Winnipeg example can be applied to a wide range of different
issues and situations. It gives the focal group considerable
flexibility in making any quick decisions that are necessary,
and it provides reasonable guarantees for continued support
over the life of the issue. In some circumstances, however,
a group may find that there is a need for an even more
structured relationship with the other groups. Such a
relationship might be termed a coalition.

A coalition involves a number of organizations coming
together on an issue and setting up some kind of formal body
to make decisions on goals and actions. This formal body
is usually a steering committee composed of representatives
from each of the organizations. Often the participating

groups agree not to take any action on the issue unless it has been agreed to by the steering committee. Sometimes decisions of the steering committee cannot be implemented unless they are brought back to the participating groups and approved by those groups. In a coalition the rules determining the extent of the independence of the groups should be understood and agreed upon by all from the beginning.

A formal coalition should always have a clearly defined, highly focussed issue or set of issues. Without this, groups may have quite divergent expectations as to the purpose of the coalition and this can lead to bitter fighting at a later time.

The coalition relationship is quite different from either facilitation or alliance. In these latter two there is a group that is the centerpoint (the facilitating group and the focal group, respectively) and the primary link is out from the centerpoint to each of the other groups individually. The link between the other groups on the issue can be very weak, if there is any at all.

In a coalition, on the other hand, each of the participating groups feed into a centerpoint which is the steering committee. The steering committee provides a formal link between each of the groups. It is certainly a stronger link than in the alliance, but some of the flexibility in decision-making may be lost.

A coalition has one important similarity to a facilitation: They both work in situations where all of the groups involved in an issue have a primary interest in that issue. This contrasts with an alliance situation where the focal group may be the only one with a primary interest while the others are only offering their support.

The formal coalition is generally used only under somewhat special circumstances that require a structured forum where actions can be debated, common ground can be ironed out and decisions jointly agreed upon. It might be useful, for example, where there are a number of groups with a common goal but where the level of trust between the groups is not high, their primary concerns are with different aspects of the issue, or their approaches to tactics are substantially dissimilar. The existence of a decision-making steering committee might be an assurance to each group that it won't be taken advantage of by another; or it might simply assure that no one group will get all the credit when all the groups were equally involved in the work.

A coalition might also be useful in cases where several groups are going after different but related issues, and none of these groups feels it can win its own issue by itself. In such a situation they might make a deal to support each others' issues. Each group would probably feel, however, that its issue should be the first priority. Under these circumstances, a steering committee would be a practical mechanism for making decisions on priorities and strategies.

A coalition approach would also be useful when such a public demonstration of solidarity is of tactical benefit. This was the case in Montreal with respect to the natural parent and foster parent groups in particular. That they stood together on an issue that might have been expected to divide them no doubt had an impact on the positions taken by social agencies and others.

Usually coalitions only work if each group sees that it is going to get something out of it - something which it really wants and which it could not get on its own. Without

this kind of pay-off most groups would not be willing to give up the independence which is necessarily lost by joining a formal coalition.

This loss of independence makes the "pay-off factor" much more important in a coalition than in an alliance. In an alliance the support groups give up none of their independence and, since they do not see themselves as having a primary self-interest in the issue, do not generally expect any such pay-off from the result.

There are many potential problems in a coalition and any group that enters one should be aware of them. Decision-making can be slow; instead of one organization taking the lead, there is a steering committee of many organizations and some kind of agreement has to be worked out between them. This is all the more a problem if steering committee decisions have to be ratified by each participating organiza-tion before they can be implemented. Secondary issues can frequently arise as each group tries to pursue its own agenda. Sometimes a lot of energy will be spent arguing about questions on which the groups strongly disagree but which are only slightly related to the issue on which the coalition is based. Power plays are also a danger.

Some organizations - especially those that are long established and have more formal structures - might be much more reluctant to join a coalition than to give their support to an alliance or participate in a facilitation. This is a particularly important consideration if the support of social service agencies, churches or other such organizations is being sought.

The Quebec foster care issue is a good example of a coalition. It was made up of five groups, each of which had its own priority issue. The Social Agency Consumers were

primarily concerned with the new requirements for payments
from natural parents; the Foster Parents Association with
the inadequacy of payments to foster parents; G.M.A.P.C.C.
with the effect the regulations would have on welfare
recipients; the social workers with the fact that they would
have to collect the payments; and the day care workers with
the imminent closing of day care centers and the effect they
felt this would have on the placement of children in foster
care. With the exception of the day care workers, the
relationship between the issues was very clear and it made
sense for the groups to work together. However there was
considerable potential for suspicion between some of them -
particularly between the foster and natural parents. So a
steering committee was necessary as a forum for decision-
making.

Coalitions formed around a specific issue (or issues)
generally end when that issue has been won or lost. Sometimes,
however, it is proposed that permanent coalitions be formed
which don't dissolve when the issue is settled. More often
than not, such permanent coalitions have little to recommend
them.

The existence of a permanent coalition can frequently
lead groups to feel that they have to take all of their
issues to the coalition. But such coalitions are not
always the most effective vehicles for dealing with issues.
Different issues appeal to different groups, so it is better
to be able to pick support groups on the basis of the
issue, rather than try to sell an issue to some groups just
because they happened to have supported a previous issue.
The latter approach can often lead to half-hearted support,
if any at all. Failure to win support on the new issue
from the old coalition may tie a group's hands. If instead

it proceeds with the issue, either alone or in alliance
with groups outside the coalition, it may be accused of
undermining the coalition and find itself in serious conflict
with its supposed partners.

Permanent coalitions also tend to become organizations
of their own, and their organizational existence can become
a goal unto itself. A lot of effort can get spent just
keeping the coalition together, even if it isn't doing
anything. It can keep the leadership of the participating
groups so busy that they can't give enough attention to their
own group's needs. It sometimes can create a dangerous gap
between the leadership and the membership of a group. More
than one group has ceased to exist except in name when its
leaders came to devote so much of their time to a permanent
coalition that they failed to notice they were losing their
own members in the process.

There is one kind of situation where permanent coalitions
seem to have worked: where similar kinds of groups with
similar ongoing interests are operating in different
locations. Umbrella organizations bringing together poor
people's groups from across a city or province are examples
of such permanent coalitions.

These umbrella organizations are new entities which
represent a larger geographic area and which can deal with
the level of government whose authority extends over that
whole area. It might be very difficult, for example, for a
poor people's group in a small town to create an issue
involving changes in provincial welfare legislation. An
umbrella organization of all the poor people's groups in
the province, on the other hand, would be in a much stronger
position to raise such an issue.

There have also been some permanent coalitions of
dissimilar groups from the same geographic area which have
been successful. An umbrella organization of all the
residents' groups, churches, and other community organiza-
tions in a particular neighborhood is an example of this.
The common neighborhood-wide interests have to be stronger
than the special interests of the individual groups for this
to work, however, and this has very often not been the case.

Except in these kinds of special situations, permanent
coalitions should probably be avoided. More often than not,
they get in the way of effective ad hoc alliances or
coalitions developing around specific issues and responding
to the circumstances of those issues. Permanent coalitions
are certainly a drain on the resources and energy of the
participating groups. Unless there is a considerable return
which justifies this drain, they serve little useful purpose.

Permanent coalitions stand at the extreme end of the
range of possible relationships between groups. Far more
commonly, a group with an issue will need to decide what kind
of ad hoc relationship it wants to try to establish with
other groups in pursuing that issue. The informal facilita-
tion, the more structured alliance, and the formal coalition
are basic models for issue-oriented relationships.

There are, of course, many other possible models that
combine aspects of any or all of these. There are also
many possibilities of mixed models. In the Saskatchewan
issue, for example, the basic relationship was a facilitation,
but one of the groups involved was S.C.A.P.O., a coalition
of poor people's groups. Thus the member groups of
S.C.A.P.O. were operating within a coalition which was
itself a part of a facilitation.

The past experience of groups in the community who have worked together - whether successfully or unsuccessfully - may be an important factor in what type of relationship is used. Which of all the possibilities a group will decide upon will ultimately depend on the circumstances of the issue and of the community. What is best is what will be most effective in the given situation.

BRINGING GROUPS TOGETHER; KEEPING GROUPS TOGETHER

In actual practice, the kind of relationship that a group establishes with other organizations on an issue, and the process of bringing the organizations together, are very closely bound. What organizations it wants to bring together will affect what kind of relationship it initially decides to try to set up. If, for example, the group identifies several organizations which have strongly divergent reasons for wanting a common goal, it might initially try to set up a facilitation. But as it actually goes about contacting these organizations and/or getting their support, it may discover that a different kind of relationship is necessary, or simply more advantageous. Perhaps the group will discover, to continue the example, that the organizations would be willing to work together on this one issue, providing there was a formal decision-making mechanism. A coalition might then be possible.

Furthermore, the relationship may always change as the issue develops. What began as a coalition, for example, might become an alliance as greater trust developed between the groups and all agreed that greater flexibility and speed in decision-making was desirable.

For any kind of relationship to work, however, it is obviously necessary to bring groups together in the first place. There are a few basics to keep in mind in doing this job.

The first question, of course, is which of the many organizations that exist in any community the group should try to bring together. The nature of the issue will be the most important factor in making this decision. Each issue will probably suggest its own set of possible organizations. The group should look at its issue carefully and then try to figure out how the various aspects of the issue relate to what other organizations are doing. The Winnipeg and Quebec examples are good illustrations of bringing together the "natural" groups on the two respective issues.

Past experience of working with certain groups on other issues might be an important consideration. Where groups have supported each other on previous issues and a high degree of trust and cooperation has developed between them, their support might be expected even if the issue isn't of direct concern to the other group. In Montreal, for example, the Ad Hoc Committee of Social Workers and G.M.A.P.C.C. had worked together on several previous issues; even if the social workers had not had a strong self-interest in the foster care issue, they would have supported the position of the citizens' groups.

The amount of time which is available to mobilize support is important. If an issue is developing very rapidly and the group must move quickly, it may only try to get support from those groups which are likely to give it with little hesitation. This was the case in Montreal; it was also the case in Winnipeg during the initial stage of the issue. If there is more time, the group might be able

to reach out to other organizations and devote effort to explaining the issue to them and trying to move them to give their support. The large number and variety of groups involved in the Saskatchewan issue give some illustration of how broad a range of groups can be mobilized if there is enough time.

The group might decide that the support of some particular organization is extremely important for tactical purposes and it might try to make a special effort to get that support. In Saskatchewan, for example, it was tactically very important to get the support of the National Farmers' Union, since the province is predominantly rural and farmers are the largest single constituency. The support of the N.F.U. had to have a major influence on the commission considering the province-wide legal aid plan.

The definition which a group has adopted for an issue will also have a major effect on where it can go to get support. If it has been defined as a "motherhood" issue, the range of potential support groups may be quite broad. The definition used in Winnipeg is an example of creating a motherhood issue; virtually everyone could oppose taking away the family allowance, especially from a poor family. On the other hand, if the group has defined the issue in a more controversial way, it may have fewer potential supporters. This might be compensated for, however, by a deeper level of commitment from the few groups it could mobilize; or the group might feel that it has to sacrifice potentially broad support because the issue is too basic for a "lowest common denominator" approach.

Finding the definition of an issue which will get a group the support it wants (or needs) but which does not compromise a group's basic objective can frequently be a

very difficult job. On most issues a group will want the
broadest possible support. The support of some organizations
might only be obtained by agreeing to some changes in the
definition of the issue. In most cases the group should not
be so inflexible as to reject every such change out of hand.

Often, however, the problem is quite the opposite:
There is a considerable temptation to progressively weaken
the definition of the issue to get the support of more and
more organizations. The group has to be very wary of letting
this get to the point where the issue is so weakly defined
that it barely exists, or where the group's original goal
has been totally lost. There is a proper balance between
rejecting and accepting changes in the definition; the
group has to stay on guard that it has not compromised away
its issue.

Identifying the potential support groups and actually
getting their support are two different matters. The real
test, of course, is to get the support.

All organizations have some kind of structure for
making decisions. There is usually a president or chairman,
an executive committee and a policy-making board. An
organization with staff would also have a staff structure,
with different persons doing specialized jobs. In a large
organization there may also be additional special committees
or other structures that play a role in decision-making.

In approaching an organization, then, there are often
a large number of persons and groups of persons to whom one
could go. Where should the group begin?

The usual approach is through the top - either the
president or, if the organization has a staff, the executive
director. In many cases this is the best way. But in many
other cases, it isn't. The president might know nothing at

all about an issue and, with a great many other demands
being put on his/her time, not feel that any time can be
spent becoming acquainted with the issue. Or it might even
happen that the president has an opposing view on the issue
and that to go to him/her would result in an immediate
refusal.

There might, however, be someone else in the organiza-
tion - perhaps someone on the board or someone on the staff
- who might be very sympathetically disposed to the group's
position. This person might have come into contact with
the problem through his work and so be already aware of
its significance. Or it might be something that particularly
interested that person.

If there is such a person in the organization, the
group would be well-advised to approach the organization
through him. They would probably find it easy to enlist
his personal support, and he could then try to informally
persuade his fellow board or staff members. The participa-
tion of the N.F.U. in Saskatchewan, and the YWCA and United
Church in Winnipeg, show how important it is to go to the
right person in an organization and how that person can move
the organization to take a position.

Even if there isn't such an inside-supporter, the
group might find that there is still a better way of
approaching a group than directly at the top. One person
might be particularly influential in the organization and,
if he were persuaded on an issue, could swing the entire
organization. The board of the Family Service Bureau in
Saskatoon was persuaded by one member who first became
educated herself on the legal aid issue and who then
persuaded the other board members. Certain kinds of decisions
might be entrusted to some sub-group (a committee of the

board, for example) whose members would be easier to persuade than the entire board. There are a great many other possibilities.

The key to approaching an organization, then, is to know who the key people in the organization are, and to know the organization's structure. This includes knowing how the organization operates, how decisions get made, whether board meetings are open or closed to the public, and so on.

Getting all of this information when an issue is breaking can be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Many issues require quick action and a group hardly has time to do research on several organizations, much less develop good personal contacts within them. It is very much a case where advance work is necessary - laying the groundwork before the issue breaks so all of the information and contacts will be there when they are needed. This was clearly demonstrated in Saskatchewan by the results of the advance work done by the group in the Saskatoon Clinic during the period when they were awaiting official word on the establishment of the commission.

When a group is in a quiet period between issues, it should try to find out about the concerns and activities of other organizations in its community and how they are structured. This doesn't mean just a mechanical information-gathering project, like getting a list of the members of the board or an organization chart or being placed on their mailing list (although these are all useful things). It means making personal contact with the organization and getting to know (and be known by) some of its key people.

After the initial round of contacts have been made, there is the ongoing task of maintaining them - keeping the contact person (or persons) informed on what the group is

doing, learning about new people in the organization, and meeting those who might play influential roles in the future. All of this kind of personalized information is what can make the crucial difference when an issue breaks.

Some subtlety and sensitivity is needed in carrying out this job. No organization will appreciate being "investigated" by another, nor will a contact person be very useful if he feels that he is being set up so he can be used when the need arises. The group which initiates the contact has to be very careful to avoid giving either of these impressions. Forming a solid contact between groups is a two-way street, both should ultimately benefit from it.

Who actually makes the contact with an organization - whether for a general information-sharing purpose or around a specific issue - is an important factor. An organization may respond quite differently depending on who approaches it and what kind of an approach that person uses. A lesson can be drawn from the techniques which have been developed by the large charity campaigns: They divide their potential donors into sectors, usually based on occupations. The campaign then has a division which is responsible for raising money from each sector. The volunteers who staff each division are drawn from that sector - lawyers man the division responsible for soliciting from lawyers, doctors the division responsible for doctors, and so on. This is all based on the principle that it is much harder to refuse someone with whom you might have professional, or even social, contact throughout the year.

Most groups, of course, would hardly be able to have such a sophisticated system. Nor would they really need it. But the basic principle is still the same: In making contact with another organization, some members may be

better suited than others and they should be given the job.
In making contact with a local church, for example, it
would clearly be best that this be done by someone who
attends that church. If this isn't possible, the group
might have a member who knows the minister or a key member
of the church council in another context; or perhaps there
is a member who belongs to another parish of the same
denomination and whose minister could give some useful
information about the interests and opinions of the minister
whose support the group is seeking.

The job of bringing groups together breaks down into
these three basic parts: identifying the groups, having
good information and contacts so the right approach is
made, and picking the right person to make the contact.
When this is done and the groups have been brought together,
the job is then to keep them together.

There are two key elements to keeping groups together:
good leadership within each of the groups, and good communica-
tion between the groups. The importance of good leaders is
obvious. Without sensitive and skillful leadership within
each group - leadership that can find the balance between
protecting the interests of its own group and responding to
the concerns of other groups - any facilitation, alliance
or coalition can quickly flounder. And with good leadership,
groups of very divergent interests and points of view can
work together around a common issue.

Good leadership is particularly important at the start
of an issue. The leaders may have to take the initiative
of persuading their members that the organization should
become involved in an issue, or that the organization should
work with some other group that may in the past have seemed
like the opposition. This was clearly shown in the Quebec

issue where good leadership in the Foster Parents' Association
led that group to work together with the natural parents'
group in spite of the traditional distrust between them.

Good communication between the groups is the other
important element in keeping them together. This is the
particular responsibility of the group which is the center-
point of the common effort - the facilitating group in a
facilitation, the focal group in an alliance, or the steering
committee in a coalition. All groups should be kept up to
date on the status of the issue. This is obviously necessary
when developments are taking place rapidly and the situation
is in a state of constant flux. It is equally important
during periods when there is no open or public activity
that requires the active participation of all the groups,
because it is then that interest tends to lag and groups
can come to feel themselves no longer involved.

This communication can take different forms. It might
be a special newsletter that is sent to each of the groups.
Or it could be just staying in periodic and regular touch
with the contact persons in each organization. Whatever
form it takes, it must be remembered that the support groups
require servicing to keep being support groups - they have
to be kept informed and they have to be told that their
support is still needed. Until an issue is finally won, a
group will never know when it might have to go back to its
support groups and ask them to take another action. The
group should always make sure that it can do this.

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE MEDIA

Issues have to be brought to the public's attention
if they are going to be won. As many people as possible have
to be made aware of the issue and what the group is trying
to do about it. This means that the issue has to attract
the attention of the media - newspapers, radio and television.

Waiting for the media to pick up an issue on its own
is a considerable risk. They might never pick it up. Or
they might notice it but not understand the issue and give
distorted coverage. Or, worst of all, they might hear of
the issue from the opposition and report the opposition's
definition of the issue.

The group which gets to the media first and which does
an effective job of explaining its definition of an issue
stands a good chance of having its definition be the one
which gets lodged in the public mind. This can be an
extremely important tactical advantage, as was demonstrated
in the Winnipeg family allowance issue.

A basic element in dealing with the media is to have
good contacts within the various news organizations. This
can be especially important with newspapers, which often
assign a particular reporter to cover all stories in a
particular subject area. Thus the same one reporter may
cover all local stories dealing with health, welfare and
housing. Or these may be three different reporters. Other
newspapers have no such beat system but give their reporters
a considerable flexibility to follow their own interests in
the choice of the stories they cover.

A group should keep its eye on what by-lines appear on
stories that relate to its concerns. When it has identified
a reporter who seems to have done several stories in this

area, or who has done a particularly good job on even one
story, it should try to develop a contact with that reporter.

Like its contacts with other organizations, the contact
with a good reporter has to be kept up. The group should
provide him with the background information needed to
understand the areas of its concern. This is another part
of laying the groundwork before an issue arises.

If the group has laid this groundwork, then when an
issue breaks it can call its contact, give him the story,
and be assured that he will know enough about the background
of the issue to do a good article. Some of the clearest and
most accurate newspaper stories come out of personal contact
between a group and a reporter who has gotten to know the
group. In Winnipeg, for example, there was excellent coverage
of the family allowance issue by one reporter who knew a
great deal about the subject matter and with whom the Council
of Self-Help had a good working relationship. The same was
true in Quebec of reporters for several of the Montreal
papers.

Instead of this one-to-one contact with a particular
reporter, a group will sometimes try to reach many reporters
at the same time by holding a press conference. A press
conference is usually aimed at getting coverage from
television media because it creates a visual event which
can be filmed. There is a considerable amount of work which
should be done before holding one.

Spokesmen have to be chosen in advance and it has to
be clearly decided what they will say. If other members of
the groups involved in the issue are present, they have to
be trained not to speak to the press - that's the job of
the spokesmen and no one else. Speaking into a camera can be

quite unsettling; if the group has access to videotape
equipment it is a good idea to give the spokesmen some
actual practice in doing it.

At the press conference the group will want to
circulate a news release which will summarize the points it
wants to make. It should be concise and should be written
in a journalistic style. A well-written press release can
provide the basis of a good story.

An invitation to the press conference, indicating
what it will be about, should be hand-delivered - preferably
to the reporter who the group wants to have attend. A
follow-up phone call the evening before the conference to
confirm his attendance is also a good idea.

The time a press conference is held is also important.
A group should find out about deadlines for afternoon news-
papers and evening news programs.

Press conferences can be risky. It is very easy for
the group to lose control of what happens and, even more, of
what gets reported. An ill-advised response to a question
can be broadcast on the evening news and do a great deal of
damage to the group's position. Questions that are unrelated
or barely related to the issue can get asked and can
generate the entire coverage. There is usually little
opportunity to provide background information on the issue.

Before a group holds a press conference, it should have
a clear purpose in mind for having one. Television coverage
on any given story is usually brief and hardly ever in-depth.
T.V. may reach a lot of people, but it doesn't get across as
much information as a good newspaper article. Moreover,
television newsmen rarely have specialized beats and so are
not apt to have a great deal of the background information
needed to understand an issue.

The real battleground on which issues are won or lost is very often the media coverage. By the time the decision-makers meet, their decisions will have been influenced by what they have seen of public attitudes on the issue. If every day's news carries yet another report of further support for one position or another, decision-makers cannot ignore this.

Sometimes an issue is to be decided almost overnight. In such a case a group will want to show all its support immediately. More often, however, there will be a period of at least several weeks, if not months, before the final decision is made. In such a case groups will want to time their announcements in such a way as to generate as many occasions for stories as possible. In Winnipeg, for example, almost every day brought the story of another group endorsing the Council's position. If all of these groups had announced their support the same day there would have been only one day's story instead of more than a dozen.

Sometimes groups will want to encourage the creation of ad hoc support bodies. Thus, if a number of individual doctors or lawyers or whatever offer support they should be encouraged to form a "doctors in support of ..." group or a "lawyers in support of ..." group. Six lawyers who form a group to collectively offer support on an issue represent a potential story; as six individual supporters they likely don't.

Sometimes a group will want to supplement the news coverage of its issue with letters to the editor. In Quebec a letter to the editor by the foster parents' group, published in one of the Montreal papers, had a considerable impact, explaining why foster parents were badly in need of an increase in the allowance paid them, but why these

shouldn't be at the expense of low-income natural parents.
Supportive letters to the editor from individuals not directly
affected by the issue can also be valuable - particularly
when they come from clergymen or other influential community
figures.

CONCLUSION

Social issues can be won by the group which identifies
the right issue at the right time, presents it well and
effectively organizes support for it. The experiences in
Winnipeg, Quebec and Saskatchewan all demonstrate this.
Other issues and other groups in other places could equally
have been chosen for this purpose. But however many
experiences might have been examined, no absolute formula
could have been offered. No two recipes for success will
be exactly alike.

The Winnipeg experience could not have been transported
to Quebec or Saskatchewan. The Quebec model would not have
fitted in Saskatchewan or Winnipeg. The Saskatchewan approach
would not have had the same result in Quebec or Winnipeg.
In fact, what worked in Winnipeg on the family allowance
issue might not even work in Winnipeg on a different issue
or in a different decision-making context. And the same
is true for Quebec and Saskatchewan.

If there is one central principle which emerges from
examining the three experiences it is that circumstances
dictate courses. A successful strategy for pursuing an
issue must fit the circumstances of the issue, the community
and the particular decision-making structure involved.

Mobilizing support when a decision is to be made by a
city council in open meeting is not the same as when it is

a provincial cabinet which will decide behind closed doors.
Organizing when the date for decision is known is not the
same as when it is unknown. Organizing around an open
question, when government hasn't taken even a tentative
position, is very different from organizing to convince it
to change its mind. Getting government to do something it
hadn't planned to do may call for a different strategy than
convincing it to abandon plans it has already made.

A facilitation, an alliance or a coalition - or any
conceivable combination of these - will be the appropriate
basis for organizing when it fits the issue and the groups
involved, the wrong basis when it doesn't. A high profile
campaign is a good strategy in some situations, a bad one
in others. Sometimes a demonstration in large numbers will
move decision-makers to accept a group's position; sometimes
it will make them all the more rigid and unwilling to appear
"weak" by bowing to such pressures.

The group that knows its issue, its community and its
target, and builds its strategy accordingly, has no
guarantee of success; but it has a lot better chance than
one which doesn't. Whether it wins or loses on particular
issues, it will be able to increase public awareness of
those issues and lay the groundwork for better informed
public debates on such issues in the future. And to the
extent that more groups become better able to influence the
process by which the decisions which affect them are made,
the promise of participation will have come that much
closer to realization.

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